Volume 10, Issue 13   Atari Online News, Etc.   March 28, 2008

=~=~=~=

A-ONE #1013   03/28/08

  ~ CCAG 2008 Approaching! ~ People Are Talking!   ~ KeyEdit for FreeMiNT!
  ~ Gossip Site Denials!   ~ Brits Overhaul Ratings ~ 'Dead Space' Cartoon!

```
     ~ Mac Gets Hacked First! ~ Vietnam Memorial Wall! ~ ACEC Swap Meet News!
     ~ Tax Scam Season Here!  ~ Xbox Live Cheaters!    ~ The Eee PC 900 News!

                    -* Browser Wars Heating Up Again *-
                  -* Microsoft Warns of New Word Attack! *-
                -* Open Source Benefits from US Unpopularity! *-




                              =~=~=~=



->From the Editor's Keyboard              "Saying it like it is!"
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""
```

I know that my calendar is correct! It is spring, right? What's with
all of this cold weather? And, gasp, it snowed here in New England
again today! Enough is enough already!

So, rather than take my frustrations due to this wintry weather out on
you folks, and dive into another despicable topic like spam (the mail
kind, not the stuff from Hormel!), I'm going to retire to a good book
or something - far from the window so I don't have to see that white
stuff outside!

Until next time...

```
                              =~=~=~=



                     KeyEdit 1.0 for FreeMiNT
```

I've just released a small GEM utility for editing keyboard layouts for
FreeMiNT. It allows you to easily edit the keytable.tbl keyboard files
used by FreeMiNT >= 1.16. ARAnyM-users in particular might find this tool
useful due to the amount of different PC keyboards.

It's available on http://atari.nvg.org/download.html

--

```
/*
** Jo Even Skarstein   http://joska.nvg.org/
*/
```

```
                              =~=~=~=



->A-ONE User Group Notes!  -  Meetings, Shows, and Info!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""
```

The CCAG 2008 Show is Coming!

Buy, sell, trade, play, and see classic video games, computers, peripherals, memorabilia, and more at the Classic Computing and Gaming Show (CCAG) on May 24, 2008 at the American Legion Hall - Clifton Post, 22001 Brookpark Rd, Fairview Park, OH from 2:00 PM - 6:00 PM. Vendors, clubs, and collectors will be displaying and selling their retrogaming and retrocomputing goods, from Pong and Atari to Nintendo, Apple and IBM to Commodore and everything in between with many set up for you to play with and explore. We have 4000+ square feet of space. Help us fill it all up!

For more information please go to http://www.ccagshow.com/

ACEC Swap Meet!

ACEC Swap Meet September 13, 2008

ATARI COMPUTER ENTHUSIASTS
OF COLUMBUS, OHIO
VINTAGE COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAME SWAP MEET

September 13, 2008
9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. EDT
Oakland Park Community Center
980 Lenore St.

All vintage and classic computers, video games, systems, accessories, games, and software invited!

Vendor and Flea Marketeer donation: Free!
Shoppers and onlookers donation: Free!

Further info:
chwbrown@ee.net Charles (614) 447-9789
rarenz@columbus.rr.com

http://www.angelfire.com/oh4/acec/acec.html

=~=~=~=

PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Whew! What a week it's been. I, as many of you know, am still looking for a job, and that search isn't getting

any easier. Each time there's a news story about the economy, about a bank closing, about the war in Iraq, about commodities or Wall Street, employers seem to tighten their belts another notch. Too bad for me... and at least several hundred thousand other people actually trying to find a job.

On a (more) personal note, I've had a lot of family concerns for the past few weeks (well, several months, truth be told) which revolve around my father. He had knee replacement surgery in late November. The knee replacement went fine, and he's now considered completely recovered from that ordeal.

While convalescing from the knee surgery, however, he had a problem with a blood clot blocking off the blood flow to the optic nerve of his right eye. As a result, the nerve died, and he's now completely blind in that eye. That would be bad enough, but he has a problem with his left eye that would cause blindness in it in the 12-to-18 month range.

When I say 'problem', I really should say 'problems', since there are multiple things that require surgery. According to his ophthalmologist, any one of the problems would require delicate and intricate surgery. And because each time you go into an eye surgically (much like any other way you might decide to go 'into' an eye), the risk of problems or 'degraded outcomes' increases.

For that reason, the surgeon decided to fix all three problems at once. First, the lens of his eye was entirely clouded, and enlarged do to the buildup of enzymes. Then there was the fact that the iris (the colored part of your eye) was basically 'stuck' to the protective sac that holds the lens, being attached via the aforementioned enzymes, which act like mooring lines or tethers between the two structures. Then, there was the cornea, which had scarring due to continual abrasion by metal particles/dust from over half a century of tool and die making. The cornea was also "tight", meaning that instead of raising in a high arc over the iris ind pupil of the eye, it was more 'flat'.

With the lens being enlarged (in all dimensions) and the cornea sitting so tight over the surface of everything else, it had the net effect of squeezing the iris between the two, like of like a pancake between two dinner plates. It couldn't move they way it was designed... ummm... excuse me... the way it evolved to move.

I don't know what the exact procedures were, and I don't know that I'd understand the incredible precision and expertise it takes to carry them out, but I know that it's not an everyday occurrence, and that the chances were about even as to whether or not he'd be able to see any better/at all when the surgery was done.

Well, the surgery was yesterday morning, and I took he and my mother to the doctor's office this morning for the 'unveiling', and the first words out of my father's mouth were "dammit, that's bright!". A good sign, to be sure. He can see well enough to locomote about the house now, with better site expected over the coming days.

It's amazing to me that things like this can be done, that they can be done in my home town, and that they're done with regularity. No, this wasn't a one-in-a-million situation, but it might have been a one-in-a-couple-thousand situation, and I'm grateful that there was a surgeon with the talent, tools and experience to secure a successful outcome.

Oh, and my father's kind of happy with the results too. [grin]

Okay. Even though the above was completely devoid of anything resembling Atari information, I think we should get to the news and stuff. How's that?

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
===================================

'Redrumola' asks about CP/M on an ST:

"Forgive me if this is a dumb question to long time Atari users. I've never owned an Atari computer, I'm a C= user. I think I read somewhere that TOS was based on CP/M-68000. If that's the case, is TOS binary compatible with CP/M-68000 programs, or at least source code compatible?

I'm just curious as I like to tinker with CP/M boxes as a hobby. I own a Commodore 128, Televideo TS-803H and Kaypro 10, all of which run Z80 CP/M."

'MiKRO' replies:

"That's really out of the question. If you want some kind of compare, try to ask how MSDOS and CP/M are compatible with each other. They are similar, yes, but source level compatibility, hardly."

Peter West asks for a refresher course on the maximum hard drive size for the various flavors and incarnations of TOS:

"There has been some discussion in the past here about the maximum partition size available on Ataris. I seem to remember that Uwe has said that with TOS 4 or MagiC you cannot exceed 1 GB.

However, a club colleague with a CT60 Falcon has installed several hard drives in it, and recently added a 15 GB one as a single partition. He is running HDDRIVER. This seems to work fine under MagiC, and he has experimentally transferred nearly 3 Gigs to it, all of which appear to be accessible without problems. The Jinnee desktop reports for it:

12.044.165.120 bytes free
 2.961.072.128 bytes used
15.005.237.248 bytes total
     1.831.694 clusters
            16 sect/cluster
           512 bytes/sector

The disk itself shows:
 2.130.024.465 bytes
       129.089 files (many of these are quite small)
        12.869 folders
            23 links

Of course the 16 sect/cluster means that even a 1-byte file takes

up 8kB of disk space, but then there is plenty of room on the drive!

I don't know whether the CT60 or its drivers have changed anything.
Any comments, Uwe? It would be nice to clear this up once and for all!
Specially as it is getting increasingly difficult to buy anything
smaller than 40 GB or so these days!"

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, tells Peter:

"This has to be a FAT32 partition, but it cannot be FAT16. A 16 bit FAT
does not support more than 65535 clusters. FAT32 partitions are
supported by MagiC and MiNT, but not by plain TOS."

Djordje Vukovic posts this about TeraDesk:

"Version 3.95 of TeraDesk open-source desktop for the 16-bit and 32-bit
lines of Atari computers is available at:

        http://solair.eunet.yu/~vdjole/teradesk.htm

This release fixes several bugs related to handling of times and dates.
It also brings an improvement in behaviour related to 'special'
applications. Powering-off of CT60 at shutdown now works correctly,
even in single-TOS.

Beside the changes made to the program itself, a new page was added to
the introductory section of the hypertext manual, highlighting some nice
features specific to TeraDesk which otherwise may pass unnoticed by
users."

Francois Le Coat politely tells Djordje:

"Thanks much for the work on TeraDesk!"

Djordje replies:

"On the matter of shutdown I would like to comment that TeraDesk can
power-down CT60 on its own in single-TOS (and probably in Magic), but
uses power-down code of Mint whenever Mint is running , e.g. in Aranym.
Unfortunately TeraDesk can not shut down (terminate) Aranym when it is
running single-TOS: Aranym uses a rather complicated and illogical
shutdown method (IMO the development concept of Aranym and Mint has
gone astray in some aspects) and too much additional code would have to
be linked into TeraDesk in order to perform a self-contained
termination of Aranym."

'ggnkua' adds:

That could be overcome if someone wrote an external program that does
that, and that Teradesk could call. Of course the best thing would be
to change aranym's power-off sequence."

'Steve' asks:

"Is anyone selling TOS 2.06 EPROMS anymore??"

Bill Galholt tells Steve:

"Keep watching eBay. I got mine from there. I got 'em for $20 shipped. (*woot!!*)"

Here's a question from Hallvard Tangeraas about using a Compact Flash adapter on his Mega STE:

"I've gotten hold of a Minolta CD-10 SCSI PCMCIA card-reader, a PCMCIA to Compact Flash adapter and a 1GB Compact Flash memory card. I'm trying to make it work with my Mega STe (TOS 2.06), but it only partly works. I'm using HDdriver 6.13.

My SCSI setup consists of:

- Mega STe internal SCSI hard drive (via Atari interface, ID 0)
- ICD Link II host adapter connected to DMA port
- Minolta PC-10 PCMCIA card reader (ID 4, terminated)

The device appears to be recognized by the system (it says "Sandisk DSP" when I boot up and the HDdriver info come up –but only if I turn its termination off, which doesn't make sense as it's the last and only external SCSI device).
Still, I'm not able to actually use the card-drive. If I install desktop icons for the missing device I get several device icons, but nothing happens if I double-click them.

I've messed around with the format/partition stuff in HDDRUTIL.PRG, and I suspect I've done something wrong at this stage. From memory I seem to recall Mr. Seimet saying that there is usually no need to format any drives (which makes me wonder what the "format" option is for?), but rather just partition it.
I've tried both, but since formatting seemed to go on forever I reset the computer.

Partitioning seems to work fine, but I'm not sure what kind of settings I should use and what I should enter where it says "Type". And 1 GB is the size limit for TOS, isn't it, so I should probably split the 1GB CF card into 2 equal partitions. Tried that, but I still didn't work.

Ultimately I would like to make the CF card compatible with my Mac as well as the Mega STe so I can easily transfer data between the two. I suppose that would mean making it MS-DOS compatible, but how?"

Uwe Seimet provides a bunch of answers:

"Formatting is only required if a drive has bad sectors.

Since TOS 1.06 has a maximum partition size of 512 MB you should ensure that your partitions are definitely smaller than that, e.g. 511 MB when partitioning.

You can create DOS/Windows compatible partitions, provided that you are running MagiC or MiNT, since TOS does not support them. Or you can

create a single partition (smaller than 512 MB, of course) which is
both TOS and DOS compatible. The appropriate options are offered in the
Compatibility dialog window.

Since your card reader does not work properly as far as termination is
concerned the problems you are observing are hardware problems, by the
way. Your cables may be too long. Or the card reader requires the Atari
to have its own SCSI ID (initiator identification) which is something
the ICD Link does not support. Some SCSI devices do not work properly
without initiator identification."

Mike Faz asks about surfing the 'net with his ST (I think):

"I need information on how to hook up my Ataris to the net and where I
can find what I need (example. hardware, software etc.)?"

Fred Horvat provides some answers:

"I've only done this via dialup modem. I run MagiC OS and bought CAB
browser and it comes with I-Connect dialer program. Works good I have
gotten on with my TT and STacy2 just fine. A lot of people don't like
MagiC or don't have it so they use STing or STik instead of I-Connect
with Standard TOS with CAB or another browser.

There is also the TAF MINT package that has a dialer and Web Browser in
it. It installs only in Mono and not color. It's old but from what I
heard about it is that it works. I believe it also requires at least 4
Meg of RAM.

I have not tried it recently but the Open Source (I think) browser
High-Wire and STik or STing dialers are your best bet for a stand ST to
get on the Web."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week,
same time, same station (I hope), and be ready to listen to what they
are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

                                =~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - "Dead Space" Cartoon Heralds Release!
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""   Brits To Overhaul Ratings System!
                                    Xbox Live Cheaters Get Theirs!
                                    And more!

                                =~=~=~=

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!

`""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""`

"Dead Space" Cartoon Heralds Video Game Release

Electronic Arts and Starz Media are producing an animated prequel movie to the upcoming sci-fi horror video game "Dead Space."

The film, being developed by Starz subsidiary Film Roman, will pick up where the comic book series on which it is based ends and leads to the beginning of the game.

With the game, set for a Halloween launch, Film Roman president and COO Scott Greenberg said the company is looking to release the animated film between mid-September and late October, initially as a TV special in multiple markets, followed by a home video release through Starz's home entertainment company, Anchor Bay Entertainment.

"We're really looking for this to be an event," Greenberg said. "We feel we'll attract the hardcore gamer, but we'll also get sci-fi and animation fans as well."

Greenberg said there will be two versions of the film - a softer one for TV and a harder one with more blood and coarser language for the DVD. Starz also is eyeing Web-based and wireless distribution.

Film Roman has been working for several years with Electronic Arts on projects tied to EA games. "We felt this one was the best one to launch with," noted Greenberg, whose animation company is behind "The Simpsons," "King of the Hill" and the preschool hit "Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!"

Britain To Overhaul Video Game Ratings System

The British government plans to introduce a new guidance rating system for video games and a code of practice for social networking Web sites to help protect children.

The moves follow a six-month review commissioned by Prime Minister Gordon Brown and conducted by psychologist Dr Tanya Byron.

Her report, "Safer Children in a Digital World," is backed by both the Children, Schools and Families (CSF) and the Culture, Media and Sport (CMS) departments.

Byron proposed:

* Video games should have a more "robust" movie-style age classification with clearer ratings. At the moment, games only get a mandatory review if they have sexual activity or gross violence.

* An overhaul of the way console games are advertised.

* Making it illegal for retailers to sell any video game to a child younger than the age rating on the game box.

* Developing a new code of practice aimed at regulating social networking sites, such as Bebo and Facebook, including introducing standards on privacy and harmful content;

* Undertaking a new publicity campaign for parents to understand the sort of digital material their children are accessing on the Internet and how they can block it.

* Introducing new laws banning Internet-assisted suicide.

* Creating a national UK Council for Child Internet Safety to help implement the strategy.

Byron said some parents did not understand the risks in the digital world.

Not watching what they see online, she told reporters, was akin to opening the front door and letting them play unsupervised.

"The digital world risks are similar to real world risks but can be enhanced by the anonymity and ubiquity that the online space brings," she added.

Industry groups and children's charities welcomed the review.

"I think this is a very healthy development," Claude Knights, the director of children's charity Kidscape, told Reuters. "All of these (recommendations) may lead to a much more uniform situation and better child safety.

"The safety of children is paramount but it is now up to the whole community, all of us, to ensure it happens."

Schools Minister Ed Balls said the government would implement all Byron's recommendations quickly.

Sony Unveils New Gran Turismo in London "Pit Lane"

A national competition, a selection of real super cars and a mocked up "pit lane" in London greeted the European preview of Sony PlayStation's newest version of race driving videogame Gran Turismo this week.

Red Ferraris, a yellow Lotus convertible and the newly unveiled Nissan GT-R were some of the 17 cars assembled in an underground car park in central London decorated to look like a pit lane and packed with gamers, models, a bar with staff dressed as pit crew and a DJ pumping out music.

Guests were invited to test out the latest version of the game in four arcade-style "cars" at the Thursday evening event.

Any one of 71 cars can be raced virtually in 'Gran Turismo 5 Prologue', which is, as the title suggests, an introduction to the full game, due for release at an undisclosed time in the next year or so.

There are six tracks, including a route through central London that would make most of London's boy racers salivate, and gamers can also challenge other revheads worldwide thanks to an online function.

Sony is hoping games such as Gran Turismo will help PlayStation 3 claw back market share lost to cheaper consoles produced by rivals, including Nintendo's Wii and Microsoft's Xbox. The company says more than 50 million copies of previous versions of Gran Turismo have been sold worldwide.

"The team reiterate the game every few years," said Simon Roberts, senior producer for Sony Computer Entertainment Europe.

"Every single car has its own sound, its own feel, its own weight, its own behavior, its own stopping distance, its own turning angle."

A nationwide hunt for the champion GT5 gamer ended with self-confessed geek Drew Forster walking off with a trophy and two tickets to the Le Mans 24-hour race in June.

"I've always been a Sony fan boy," the 20 year-old student from Edinburgh said.

"It was so twitchy. If you lift off the power it will kick out on you like a real car. That's the main quality of the game, how realistic it is," he said.

He only had one quibble about the prize.

"I might have exams at the time"

Xbox Live Cheaters Get Their Scores Wiped Out

Microsoft is cracking down on Xbox Live cheaters. Redmond introduced anti-Gamescore cheating tools and procedures on Xbox Live on Wednesday. If caught, cheaters will see their Gamescore reset to zero and get a message explaining that they got their hand caught in the hacker jar.

"Today we took action on some of the accounts we have identified as the most serious offenders who have violated the Xbox Live Terms of Use by tampering with their Gamescore and Achievements," Microsoft Xbox Live administrator Major Nelson wrote on his blog.

Specifically, Microsoft reset the entire Gamescore for cheater accounts to zero. Those cheaters will be unable to regain their previously obtained Achievements and Gamescore, but can keep future achievements by earning them fairly. Finally, the account will be clearly labeled as a cheater for the community to view on xbox.com and on the personal view of the gamecard in the dash.

Nelson warned Xbox Live users not to cheat in October. His latest blog post on the topic had nearly 250 comments by noon Eastern time on Wednesday. Most of the commenters welcomed the action, but some criticized Microsoft.

"CheaterMcCheat from Cheatville who's a dirty cheater? What's wrong with just the official 'find out more' subtitle? Wow, Microsoft has released a new low of immaturity," wrote a commenter called netgem21. The commenter was referring to the example page Microsoft offered to demonstrate the new tools and the "cheater branding."

An anonymous commenter wrote, "Why does everyone care so much about
people boosting their gamescores? It doesn't hurt anyone or affect
anything. This is really petty, poor show."

Mike Goodman, an analyst at Yankee Group, answered the question: "In
general, gamers don't like gamers who cheat. Furthermore, besides the
integrity of the game, it disrupts the rankings. The rankings were
designed so that you could find comparable players."

One of the most popular aspects of the Xbox Live community is the concept
of achieving a Gamescore, Goodman said. Gamescores represent your
accomplishments as a player in the community, he said, so hacking and
bloating the scores compromises the integrity of the community.

"I have a certain score that I have achieved through my game play and it
is representative of what I've done. Those achievements, to a certain
extent, are something to brag about," Goodman said. "So if you've been
cheating and your score is reset to zero, then tough noogies. Don't cheat
next time."

Goodman's bottom line is the same take many others in the Xbox Live
community have: If you want a high score, earn it.

"For 99.99 percent of the Xbox Live population out there, their scores
are earned," Goodman said. "For the very small minority of people who
are cheating, if you cheat and get caught, you will be punished. The
bottom line is there is no shortcut in life."

                              =~=~=~=

                        A-ONE's Headline News
                   The Latest in Computer Technology News
                      Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

                IRS Warns of New Online Tax Scams: Protect Yourself

Scam artists exploiting tax season have devised a range of new online
cons: fake tax documents that contain malicious surprises; mass
distribution of keyloggers aimed at snatching the identity of PC-based
tax filers; and e-mail messages containing links to Web sites that
promise new tax code information but instead push malware onto your PC.

That's not all, according to the Internal Revenue Service. This year,
identity thieves are not just trying to gain access to your bank account
or to open lines of credit in your name. Scammers are on the prowl for
ordinary citizens' identities that they can they can use in filing phony
tax returns and fraudulently claiming refunds, as well as to swipe
rebates associated with the 2008 federal economic stimulus package.

Security experts at Webroot Software& report seeing a new wave of
keyloggers (programs that secretly record every character you type),
system monitors, and viruses leading up to prime tax filing season.
Webroot's Threat Research Team says that more than 1200 new key-logging

programs and 336 versions of system monitoring spyware have been found
and defined in the past month alone.

Why the increase? Fewer taxpayers are using old-fashioned paper forms
for preparing and submitting their taxes. According to Webroot's
figures, a record 22 million taxpayers filed their taxes from a home
computer last year, up 11 percent from the previous year. Scammers know
this and figure that your identity is especially vulnerable to theft when
you're filling out your tax documents with a software program or filing
them over the Internet.

Several states warn that con artists have already begun the highly
publicized rebate checks associated as a ploy to get you to divulge
personal financial information.

Massachusetts attorney general Martha Coakley says that some state
residents have received bogus e-mail messages that purport to be from a
government agency such as the IRS or Social Security Administration. The
messages request personal information that supposedly would expedite the
turnaround time of either a tax refund or a stimulus rebate check.

For the record, the federal government expects to issue economic
stimulus rebate checks sometime in May or June. IRS refund checks
typically arrive within three weeks of the date when you e-file your
return.

Coakley warns that some fraudulent e-mail messages contain links to fake
government Web sites that request your Social Security number and bank
account numbers so that the IRS can process a rebate check. If you resist
disclosing the information, the site informs you that you won't be able
to receive your rebate.

Another tax scam involves e-mail messages that target accountants,
businesses, and individuals, notifying them of supposed changes in tax
laws. These phishing messages direct the recipient to download "updated"
tax documents that reflect the new tax laws.

The IRS reports having received numerous complaints from people who have
downloaded bogus documents to their computer - only to discover that the
documents contained malicious code designed to transfer control over the
PC to a third party.

Similarly, according to complaints fielded by the IRS, a growing number
of tax-themed e-mail messages contain links to Web sites (not files for
download) that attempt to install malware on the visitor's PC.

One variation on this gambit informs non-U.S. citizens who reside in the
United States that they must either visit a Web site or fill out an
enclosed W-8BEN tax form to establish appropriate tax withholding.
Recipients are asked to fill out the form (which is bogus) and to supply
account numbers, personal identification numbers, their mother's maiden
name, and their passport number.

Identity thieves can be remarkably brazen.

WXYZ, the ABC television affiliate in Detroit, reported that a Michigan
woman, Maria Mendoza, lost $4000 when a crook stole her identity and then
visited a local H & R Block office to file a tax return, posing as
Mendoza. After submitting the return, the scammer asked to receive her
$4000 tax refund on the spot, using a Block service called a Rapid Refund

debit card.

Here are some safeguards to help you steer clear of tax scams:

Ensure that your Windows desktop protection is current by going to Windows Update. Confirm that you have an updated antivirus software program running on your PC. When real IRS employees have questions or concerns about a tax return, they typically contact the consumer by telephone, not via e-mail.If you receive a dubious e-mail message that claims to have been sent by the IRS, report it to the tax agency at phishing@irs.gov. To check the legitimacy of any e-mail communication or phone call from a person who claims to be an IRS agent, call the IRS (1-800-829-1040). Don't click links or call telephone numbers included in suspect messages. Instead, contact the bank or the IRS directly by using phone numbers or addresses listed in published directories. Double-check the URLs you type into your Web browser. Mistyping a URL can transport you to a rogue site instead of to the one you want. Don't open e-mail attachments. In particular, e-mail attachments with ".scr," ".com," and ".exe" file extensions are likely malicious.

Browser Wars Heat Up, Again

Browsers were all the buzz over the weekend, beginning with the news that the developers of Mozilla Firefox feel their latest build is ready for widespread general use, despite technically being still only a beta. I'm not ready to make the leap full-time yet myself, but I'll definitely be looking at Firefox's new features in the coming weeks.

Firefox has long been my browser of choice; and judging from my own, completely unscientific study, I'm not alone. Access logs for my own sites show some 33 percent of visitors now use the open source browser - an impressive market share for any software.

Apple's Safari browser, on the other hand, accounts for less than 5 percent of the hits. Apple appears determined to up this statistic, but the tactics it has chosen really get my goat - and here again I'm not alone.

Mozilla CEO John Lilly was the first to point out that Apple has now begun offering Safari as an optional download whenever you receive an update to its Quicktime or iTunes software on Windows. It's "optional" in the sense that you don't have to install it, but the installer assumes that you do want it, by default. If you don't want to download and install 50MB of Safari, you need to uncheck the box manually.

This really bugs me. I'm perfectly happy with Firefox, and I see no reason why I should have Apple twisting my arm to load up my system with another browser every time it issues a security update to Quicktime.

And I should point out that it's not just Safari. I made a point to install Quicktime without iTunes on my business PC, and yet I'm still offered "Quicktime + iTunes" every time Apple releases a new update. This is annoying and coercive at best, and at worst it resembles the practices of malware makers.

The shame of it is that Safari is actually a fine browser. Apple should

be able to increase its market share on its merits alone, without
getting pushy about it.

One final note, though: My unscientific poll shows that around half my
hits still come from Internet Explorer, proving that for many of you,
these alternative browsers are a non-issue. How about it - with all the
reports of security problems and poor standards compliance with IE, what
keeps you sticking with it? And what would it take for you to switch?

VeriSign Says Registry Fees for Internet Domain Names To Rise

Internet services company VeriSign Inc said registry fees for .com and
.net domain names would increase as per its agreements with the Internet
Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), effective October 1.

VeriSign said the registry fees for .com and .net domain names will
increase to $6.86 and $4.23 from $6.42 and $3.85, respectively.

Microsoft Warns of New Attack on Word

Be extra careful when opening documents in Windows, especially if they
are Word files.

Microsoft on Friday warned that cyber criminals may be taking advantage
of an unpatched flaw in the Windows operating system to install
malicious software on a victim's PC.

The reported attack, now under investigation by Microsoft, involves a
malicious Word document, but there may be other ways of exploiting the
flaw, Microsoft said.

"Do not open or save Word files that you receive from untrusted sources
or that you receive unexpectedly from trusted sources," Microsoft said
in a security advisory posted to its Web site late in the day.

The flaw lies in the Jet Database Engine that is used by a number of
products including Microsoft Access. Microsoft is investigating whether
other programs may also be exploited in this type of attack.

Although this kind of unpatched, "zero day" attack is always cause for
concern, Microsoft downplayed the risk.

"At this time, we are aware only of targeted attacks that attempt to use
this vulnerability," the company said. "Current attacks require
customers to take multiple steps in order to be successful; we believe
the risk to be limited."

Following its usual policy, Microsoft didn't say when - or if - it
planned to patch the bug. But in a statement sent to the press, the
company did not rule out the possibility of an emergency patch,
released ahead of its next set of security updates, which are expected
on April 8.

Users of many versions of Word, including Word 2007, 2003, 2002 and

2000 are at risk, unless they are running Windows Vista or Windows Server 2003, Service Pack 2. Those two operating systems include a newer version of the Jet Database Engine that does not have the bug, Microsoft said.

For the technically savvy: this means that PCs with a version of the Msjet40.dll that is lower than 4.0.9505.0 are vulnerable.

There have been other reports of attacks targeting this database software recently. In December, the US-CERT (United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team) warned that attackers were sending out malicious Microsoft Access Database (.mdb) files in a similar type of attack. Security experts speculated that this exploit could have been based on a publicly reported flaw in the Jet Database Engine.

Newest Eee PC Has Multi-Touch Trackpad

The next generation Eee PC laptop by Asustek Computer will come with a multi-touch trackpad in addition to the larger screen, better Web cam and increased data storage, a company representative said Thursday.

The Eee PC 900 boasts an 8.9-inch screen, larger than the 7-inch display on the original Eee PC 701 model, along with a 1.3-megapixel camera and 12G-byte solid-state disk drive (SSD). The Web cam on the Eee PC 701 is only 0.3-megapixels and the largest SSD is 8G-bytes.

The Eee PC 900's oversized touchpad works similar to the Macbook Air. Using two fingers, a person can zoom in and out of documents and photos, scroll up and down, and more, an Asustek representative said.

A picture of the Eee PC 900 can be found on the Federal Communications Commission's Web site, where details were submitted for approval by the U.S. government regulator.

A few things the Eee PC 900 will not have include a touchscreen and GPS (global positioning system), the Asustek representative said, despite some news reports to the contrary.

The Eee PC 900 will come pre-loaded with either Microsoft Windows XP or Linux OSs, the representative said.

The first devices will likely hit some markets by June this year. Pricing will vary by country, but in Europe, the new Eee PC will cost around US$626.

Red Hat: Open Source Benefits from U.S. Unpopularity

The unpopularity of the United States has IT users in foreign countries happy to use open-source software, Red Hat President/CEO Jim Whitehurst said at the InfoWorld Open Source Business Conference in San Francisco on Tuesday.

This way, they do not have to pay "intellectual property taxes" to American companies, he said. Outside the United States, open source is

seen from a public policy perspective as a fundamental good, Whitehurst said.

"I never thought I would say this but actually, being very unpopular in the world, as frankly the U.S. is these days, is a huge benefit to open source," because people are resentful of sending billions of dollars back to the U.S. in IP taxes, Whitehurst said. They also do not want to pay it to Western Europe, he said.

Whitehurst said he has met with government officials in countries like Russia and China. Moving to a model not shackled by U.S. IP laws is extraordinary, he said.

But an audience member asked if Red Hat, when meeting with officials in countries not wanting to pay American companies, urges them to follow the GNU GPL (General Public License) and share code. "There is a ton of GPL violations going on," the audience member said.

Whitehurst responded he did not see some deep conspiracy over this issue but stressed the relative newness of the problem. "Absolutely it's an issue we need to watch and to manage," he said.

Whitehurst also discussed Red Hat's business model, which relies on subscriptions and support. "Fundamentally, our business model is to create enterprise editions of open source projects," he said. "We have created an enterprise version of Linux that you can sleep on [at] night knowing that it does not go down," he said. Open source also means having to work every day to keep customers happy, Whitehurst said.

More needs to be done to get enterprises involved in the open-source community, Whitehurst said. "We do a lousy job of getting enterprises involved in the community," he said.

Whitehurst said Red Hat has an 80-plus percent share in Linux with a little more than $500 million in revenues. "The dollars in open source relative to what we do are relatively small," he said.

Also at the conference Tuesday, officials from several open-source ventures, serving on a panel about the future of open source, contended that a turbulent economy was good for open source.

"I do think it's going to be good," said Roger Burkhardt, president and CEO of Ingres. "The question is when will the benefits come."

But resulting IT staff layoffs during economic downtimes means fewer people are able to start an incremental project, he said. MySQL's Zack Urlocker, vice president of products, countered that project teams without a budget will just find open-source software to get their projects going. "Sometimes the CIOs or CEOs just aren't even aware of it," he said.

Belt-tightening will be good for innovation and particularly for open source, said Mark Shuttleworth, founder of Ubuntu. "I think the absence of money is the biggest spur to innovation than the presence of money," he said.

Open-source attributes were pointed out, such as lower acquisition and maintenance costs, freedom from vendor lock-in, and access to community developed customizations. The use of open source is becoming a first option, according to Shuttleworth. "I think we're pretty close to the

point where proprietary software has to be justified instead of the other way around," he said.

During an introduction to the conference, Matt Asay, vice president of development at at Alfresco, pointed out that roughly $2 billion has been invested in open-source software since 2000 and in one year, it has all been given back through acquisitions like Sun's $1 billion acquisition of MySQL.

Open source has moved beyond CRM and content management systems, Assay said. "Can open source innovate? I think the answer is demonstrably yes," he said.

At another panel session the future of the operating system, Google's computing model, in which everything is hosted on the Internet and accessed via a thin-client browser, was questioned by an Intel official "The Google model really scares me," said Dirk Hohndel, chief Linux and open-source technologist at Intel. The model gives a third party control of data, which cannot be accessed on an airplane, he noted.

Sun's James Hughes, chief technologist for Solaris, said very large companies are looking at outsourcing their applications to Google but he has not seen it actually happen. "I don???t see anybody doing it, but maybe they will," he said.

Hughes also pointed out differences between Solaris and Linux, which are vying in the open source OS space. "There's than one OS out there, and if Solaris strives to be Linux, why bother," Hughes said. Solaris is differentiated by features like DTrace, for dynamic tracing, he said.

"In general, I don't see it as Unix versus Linux versus whatever. We've gone to a model of open source," Hughes said. Solaris, though, has had a challenge because it underwent 20 years of closed-source development before going the open-source route, he said.

Gone in 2 Minutes: Mac Gets Hacked First in Contest

It may be the quickest $10,000 Charlie Miller ever earned.

He took the first of three laptop computers - and a $10,000 cash prize - Thursday after breaking into a MacBook Air at the CanSecWest security conference's PWN 2 OWN hacking contest.

Show organizers offered a Sony Vaio, Fujitsu U810 and the MacBook as prizes, saying that they could be won by anybody at the show who could find a way to hack into each of them and read the contents of a file on the system, using a previously undisclosed "0day" attack.

Nobody was able to hack into the systems on the first day of the contest when contestants were only allowed to attack the computers over the network, but on Thursday the rules were relaxed so that attackers could direct contest organizers using the computers to do things like visit Web sites or open e-mail messages.

Miller, best known as one of the researchers who first hacked Apple's iPhone last year, didn't take much time. Within 2 minutes, he directed the contest's organizers to visit a Web site that contained his exploit

code, which then allowed him to seize control of the computer, as about 20 onlookers cheered him on.

He was the first contestant to attempt an attack on any of the systems.

Miller was quickly given a nondisclosure agreement to sign and he's not allowed to discuss particulars of his bug until the contest's sponsor, TippingPoint, can notify the vendor.

Contest rules state that Miller could only take advantage of software that was preinstalled on the Mac, so the flaw he exploited must have been accessible, or possibly inside, Apple's Safari browser.

Last year's contest winner, Dino Dai Zovi, exploited a vulnerability in QuickTime to take home the prize.

Dai Zovi, who congratulated Miller after his hack, didn't participate in this year's contest, saying it was time for someone else to win.

Gossip Web Site Denies Wrongdoing

The college gossip Web site JuicyCampus.com has criticized a consumer fraud investigation launched by the New Jersey attorney general.

"JuicyCampus has not violated any laws," reads an unsigned statement posted on the Web site earlier this week. The statement also accuses the attorney general of interfering with users' free speech.

JuicyCampus publishes anonymous, often malicious gossip about college students, with language ranging from catty to hateful and potentially offensive.

Last week the New Jersey Attorney General Anne Milgram subpoenaed the company as part of a fraud investigation. She said JuicyCampus may be violating the state's Consumer Fraud Act by suggesting that it doesn't allow offensive material but not enforcing that policy.

Since then, the Connecticut attorney general has also launched a fraud investigation of the company and its Nevada-based owner, and a California lawmaker has urged his state attorney general to do the same.

Users at the site have turned their ire on Milgram, posting defamatory suggestions about her sexual activities. The Attorney General's Office had no comment Thursday on the attacks or on the JuicyCampus statement.

"The only response from JuicyCampus that we're interested in seeing is their response to our subpoena," said Attorney General spokesman Jeff Lamm.

Vietnam Memorial Wall Now Online

Family and friends of servicemen and women who died or vanished in the Vietnam War no longer have to travel to Washington to pay their respects at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

An interactive version debuts online this week, a project of historical document archive site Footnote.com in conjunction with the National Archives and Records Administration.

The virtual version of the famous memorial - which is a pair of 246-foot black granite walls inscribed with the names of more than 58,000 American military casualties - is searchable.

Every name etched onto the real-world wall is viewable online and linked to the veteran's service record. Online visitors can add photos and describe their memories of the servicemen and women who died in the war.

Footnote.com Chief Executive Russ Wilding hopes the site will develop into an online community for veterans, family and friends to pay tribute and share their thoughts.

"The memorial is a historical document that obviously is very emotional," he says. "We want the site to help people come together to remember the veterans who were lost."

More than 2,000 photos were taken of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall to create the online version, Wilding said. He said the resulting image is the equivalent of 460 feet wide and the largest of its kind on the Web.

Wednesday was the 26th anniversary of the groundbreaking for construction of the wall, which was completed in November 1982 and officially became a National Monument two years later.

                              =~=~=~=